

THE ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

Chapter 13:1 – 14:28 The first evangelistic trip

*Who decided that Saul and Barnabas should go to preach to the Gentiles?

*Why did crowds in one city try to worship Paul and Barnabas like gods?

*Why did the same people stone Paul shortly afterwards?

Acts 13:1-3 The beginning of the trip

We concluded our study of Acts 12 with Saul and Barnabas in Antioch, a large Greek city north of Judea. They had just returned after delivering the contribution from the church in Antioch to the brethren who were suffering in Judea from a famine. The first verse in chapter 13 gives us a glimpse of what the church in Antioch was like: it was filled with Christians with different backgrounds, cultures, and abilities.

It was from this place that we are going to see the final part of Jesus' plan take shape. Remember that Jesus told His apostles, "You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). We have already seen the gospel preached in Jerusalem (chapters 2-7) and in Judea and Samaria (chapters 8-12), but how would it reach far out to the Gentile nations? The Holy Spirit had set Barnabas and Saul apart for this special work. The brethren displayed their dedication to the will of the Spirit by fasting (going without food) and praying. They laid their hands on Barnabas and Saul to show that they were chosen for the duty, and sent them off.

Acts 13:4-12 First stop: Cyprus

From Seleucia, the port of Antioch, Barnabas and Saul sailed to the island of Cyprus, in the Mediterranean Sea (you can see all these places we will study about on a map of the Middle East in New Testament times). They went across the whole island, preaching about Jesus in the Jewish synagogues. Finally, they reached the other side, where the a high Roman official named Sergius Paulus asked to hear them speak God's word. However, Sergius Paulus was accompanied by a magician, Bar-Jesus, or Elymas, who probably worked as a counselor to the proconsul. If Sergius Paulus was converted and gave up sorcery, he would no longer listen to Bar-Jesus. Bar-Jesus would be out of a job! So he tried to prevent the proconsul from believing.

Saul had heard this story before — in himself! He also had once tried to keep people from believing in Christ. He had been spiritually blind, so God had made him physically blind for a time (recall Acts 9:1-9). Now Saul was on the other side! The Lord worked through him to make Bar-Jesus blind for a certain period of time. When Sergius Paulus saw the miracle, he believed the teaching of the Lord.

Note: Miracles confirm the word

Sergius Paulus believed in Jesus because the miracles he saw showed that the message was true. We believe today based on the same reason: the gospel came with divine evidence. However, we don't see these miracles with our own eyes now like Sergius Paulus was able to. So people sometimes call us fools for believing that those things really happened. Yet Sergius Paulus saw them and believed, and he was "a man of intelligence," high in the Roman government. He also knew what mere tricks looked like — he had been accompanied by a magician, Bar-Jesus — and still he recognized that the signs worked by the apostles could only have been done by the power of God. We can believe because people like Sergius Paulus believed.

Acts 13:13-41 Second stop: Antioch of Pisidia

In verse 9, Luke begins to call Saul by his Roman name, Paul. From here on, he'll be known as Paul, and you'll also notice that Paul seems to take more prominence, doing most of the preaching. After leaving Cyprus, Paul and his companions sailed north to the mainland. When they got there, one of their helpers, John Mark, left them for some reason and went back to Jerusalem.

The group made their way to Antioch — but not the same Antioch as they started from. This one was in the region of Pisidia. On the Sabbath day (Saturday, when the Jews gathered to worship), the Jews in the synagogue of this city invited Paul to address the assembly. Paul took the opportunity to speak to them about Jesus. Let's look at some of the main points he made in the message, since Luke is giving us a sample of what Paul preached to Jews everywhere.

Verses 17-22: Israel's history

The nation of Israel, like Stephen pointed out in Acts 7, had a history of rebelling against God. Even after God led them from Egypt, they mumbled against Him in the wilderness. He gave them the land of Canaan, but they didn't clear out the former inhabitants like God commanded, so the process took over 400 years. The Israelites didn't like God's choice of government (judges) and demanded a king. Finally, God made David, a good man, to be king.

Verses 23-25: Jesus, the Son of David

God made a promise to King David that his descendant would be the Messiah (2 Samuel 7:12-17). Paul stated that Jesus, who was a descendant of David, was the promised Savior. John the Baptist testified about this.

Verses 26-31: The story of Jesus

Paul said the same things about Jesus that we have seen in other sermons: He fulfilled prophecies, He was crucified by His own people, He was raised from the dead, and He appeared to those who would later be His witnesses.

Verses 32-37: How Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises to David

Paul connected several Old Testament passages to show that Jesus' resurrection was God's way of keeping his promises to King David. Psalm 2 says that God would beget, or give being to, His Son, which the Father accomplished in raising Christ. But not only was Christ raised, He would never die again; Isaiah spoke of this when He called God's covenant with David "sure," or unfulfilling. Jesus will never leave His eternal throne to return to the grave. Another psalm declares the same message: God won't allow His "Holy One to see corruption." God didn't fulfill all these promises in David, but rather in Jesus of Nazareth.

Verses 38-41: The point

In concluding his address, Paul boldly proclaimed that forgiveness of sins and freedom could only come through Jesus, and not through the Law of Moses. The Jews were probably shocked, since for their whole lives they had been taught to carefully follow the commandments of the Law. But Paul warned them not to fall into the same trap as their forefathers and not believe in God's message.

Acts 13:42-52 A mixed reaction

The initial response to the preaching was good; many people asked Paul and Barnabas afterwards to keep talking about the gospel. They were glad to do it! The next Sabbath, great crowds came to hear the message.

But not everyone was happy with what was happening. The Jews were jealous that these men were receiving so much attention, so they tried to deny the things Paul was saying. Paul and Barnabas were not willing to tolerate their blasphemies. They spoke out and said that the Jewish nation had the first chance to accept the promised Messiah, but since they chose not to listen, the Lord was going to send His messengers to the other nations.

This was welcome news to the Gentiles! Many of them believed, and from this start, the word spread to the whole region. Finally, the Jews got enough people upset to force Paul and Barnabas from the city. But by then, God had already blessed the work in Pisidian Antioch so that it was a great success.

Acts 14:1-7 Third stop: Iconium

In the next city they went to, Iconium, Paul and his friends did the same thing they did in Antioch of Pisidia: they taught in the Jewish synagogue. They also received the same reaction: some believed, and some disbelieved and tried to hurt their cause. They managed, thanks to the Lord, to spend a long time there teaching. But finally, many of their opponents tried to stone them. When

that happened, they had to leave, but they still preached in the new places they went to.

Note: The gospel brings division

There are always two reactions to the gospel: joy, and stubbornness. We saw in Pisidian Antioch that Paul's words brought joy to those who were willing to give up their lives and traditions for Christ, but they brought jealousy to those who were more concerned about their own position and customs. We saw the same two reactions in the people of Iconium. The same thing will happen in every other place Paul goes to preach.

Why? Didn't Christ come to earth to bring peace, like the angels said when He was born? (Luke 2:14). Yet all we see is great division. Even Jesus Himself made the surprising statement: "Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division" (Luke 12:51).

The answer is clear. Certainly, Christ brought wonderful peace to all who decided to follow Him. Unfortunately, there are always those who do not wish to obey the Lord. Because of their attitudes — not because of Christ — there is division wherever the gospel goes. Conflict will probably come between us and our unbelieving family or friends when we decide to follow Jesus. But we must be willing to side with the apostles and suffer persecution alongside them.

Acts 14:8-18 Fourth stop: Lystra

After Paul and his companions fled from Iconium, they came to a city called Lystra and spoke the gospel there. One lame man believed the message. Paul, like Jesus and Peter before him, healed this lame man. But Paul was in a situation completely different from Jesus and Peter — he was among pagans, who did not believe in the one, true God. So, when the crowd of Gentiles saw the healing, they went wild with excitement, shouting in their language that Paul and Barnabas were gods. They even decided that the two were Zeus and Hermes, perhaps because there was a myth at that time that those two gods had visited the place before.

Paul and Barnabas, of course, were distraught. This was the exact opposite message that they were preaching! They cried out that the people should abandon their idols and myths and seek the real God that created the universe. They said His goodness in nature showed that He lived and cared for them. But even these words could hardly stop the crowds from offering them sacrifices!

Note: Preaching to Gentiles

Luke doesn't record every sermon that Paul preached in every place. He gives us samples. We've already seen a sample of Paul's preaching to Jews when he was in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:13-41). There, Paul discussed patterns in the history of the Israelites and showed how Jesus fulfilled promises and prophecies of the Jewish Scriptures. How was that different from preaching to the Gentiles? This story in Acts 14 gives us a glimpse.

Paul encountered two main problems in preaching to the Gentiles; both are evident in what happened in Lystra. First, he could not reason with them from the Old Testament, because they had no knowledge of the Scriptures. Second, their background of paganism and myth was difficult to overcome. So, when he spoke with Gentiles, he would emphasize the message of the true God, encouraging his listeners to abandon the false Greek gods. Paul would appeal to what can be known about God through nature in order to support his claims. We'll see more examples of this type of preaching as we continue on.

Acts 14:19-20 A drastic reversal

Imagine: one day the crowds were trying to worship Paul as a god, and only a few days later, they tried to kill him by stoning him! Why did they do this? The same Jews who had driven Paul and Barnabas from Antioch and from Iconium followed them to Lystra and convinced the people there that they were nothing but troublemakers. The crowds listened to them and stoned Paul and left him for dead.

Did Paul really die in that moment? We don't know, but an amazing miracle certainly did happen. Paul was either dead or very near to it after being brutally bruised and cut with the thrown stones, and yet he simply got up while the other disciples looked on. The Lord healed him, and proved that there was nothing man could do to stop His gospel from being spread. The very next day, Paul and Barnabas were preaching the word in a new city, Derbe.

Acts 14:21-28 The return trip

After helping many people in Derbe to come to Christ, Paul and Barnabas decided to go back through the cities where they had preached in order to encourage the disciples. They knew that the new Christians would face terrible persecutions. They lived in cities where people were hostile to Christianity; in one of them, Paul had even been stoned for speaking the word of Christ. Paul and Barnabas were concerned for the men and women that they labored so hard to help. But how could they protect them from persecution or hardship? Beside a few encouraging words, they were helpless. But they knew that they could trust these new converts to someone who was not helpless: they “commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” Christ would carry them through the tribulations into the kingdom of God.

Before leaving the region, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every church. The New Testament speaks of these men as “shepherds” of the church (see 1 Peter 5:1-4), or men who would lead in each local group of Christians. They had strict qualifications for their character (see 1 Timothy 3:1-7). Note that Paul and Barnabas didn't set one single man in charge of all the churches in that region, or even over one church. That's because elders, or overseers or pastors as they are called in other passages of Scripture, weren't supposed to be the head of the church. That was Christ's job (see Ephesians 1:22-23). The elders were just supposed to help the members of their own local church to follow what Christ, the true head of the church, had commanded.

Finally, Paul and Barnabas's trip was over, and they returned to Antioch in Syria, where they had started their journey. There, they told the brethren about all of God's wonderful works.

True or false:

- 1. Paul and Barnabas decided on their own initiative to go around the world preaching the gospel.
- 2. Sergius Paulus was a stupid man who was deceived into thinking the message about Christ was true.
- 3. The Jewish people had a history of rebellion against God.
- 4. God fulfilled His promises to David in David's son, Solomon.
- 5. All of the people in Antioch received the news of salvation in Jesus with joy.
- 6. The gospel very often causes division between family, friends, and others because not everyone accepts the truth.
- 7. The people in Lystra thought that Paul and Barnabas were the Greek gods Zeus and Hermes, and tried to worship them.
- 8. Although God's creation does not tell us everything about Him, we can see by looking at nature that He exists and that He cares for us.
- 9. The same people who tried to worship Paul ended up stoning him.
- 10. Paul gave up after he was stoned.
- 11. Paul and Barnabas encouraged the churches that they had established as they returned back to Antioch of Syria.
- 12. God will make sure we never have tribulations once we become Christians.
- 13. There should be one elder in each church, and they should get together once a year or so to decide what doctrines the church as a whole should believe.

Match the place with what happened there:

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| 1. Antioch of Syria | Paul gave a sermon that showed Jesus fulfilled God's promises to David. |
| 2. Paphos (in Cyprus) | Sergius Paulus believed the gospel when he saw Elymas the magician was blinded. |
| 3. Pisidian Antioch | Paul got up after being stoned and went with Barnabas the next day to this place. |
| 4. Iconium | Paul healed a lame man and the people tried to worship him and Barnabas. |
| 5. Lystra | Where Paul and Barnabas began their trip and also gave a report afterwards. |
| 6. Derbe | The multitude was divided about the gospel, and Paul and Barnabas had to flee. |

After you've filled out the answers, send this lesson back to the person who sent it to you with your name and address. They will correct your answers and discuss any questions or comments you have on the text.

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